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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: MINI-JIRGA ENDORSES OUTREACH TO "ALL THOSE
INVOLVED IN OPPOSITION"

REF: PESHAWAR 493

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. The Pak-Afghan mini-jirga meeting in Islamabad concluded October 28 after two days with an agreement to form follow-up committees on both sides of the border tasked with opening a dialogue with the "opposition," defined by Pakistani jirga leader Governor Ghani as "all those involved in the conflict today" who recognize constitutional governments. According to Afrasiab Khattak, who represented the Awami National Party at the meeting, little further action is expected until the next meeting in Kabul, perhaps in December. There was very little discussion of the August 2007 Peace Jirga proposals to work on issues like trade and curbing drug trafficking. Instead, the meeting focused on the idea of negotiations with the opposition as a means of conflict resolution. End Summary.

12. (C) The long-delayed mini-jirga follow-up to the August 2007 Peace Jirga in Kabul took place in Islamabad on October 27-28. Pakistan's delegation was led by Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Governor Owais Ghani, while Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was the host; President Zardari hosted a dinner for the group on October 28. Afghanistan's delegation was led by former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah. Awami National Party (ANP) leader Asfundyar Wali Khan was cited in the press as attending, but ANP actually was represented by Afrasiab Khan Khattak. Please see reftel for the list of Pakistani attendees. Post has sent the text of the concluding resolution to SCA/PB.

13. (U) In the press conference given the evening of October 28, NWFP Governor Ghani clarified that "the opposition" means "all those involved in the conflict today." He and Abdullah said the term "the opposition" was agreed at last year's Peace Jirga held in Afghanistan and its agreement there paved the way for its use in Islamabad. Ghani and Abdullah also implied that contacts had yet to be made with "the opposition" which they allowed meant the Taliban. They said the identity of delegates to the mini-jirga would be protected in order to enable their contact with "the opposition." Abdullah steadfastly deflected a taken question suggesting the conflict was between U.S. and NATO forces on one side and Al Qaida on another.

Why Now ?

14. (U) Asked why the Mini-jirga was so long in coming and whether an opportunity had been lost, Abdullah said it was

possible an opportunity had been lost as the conflict had now spread beyond the border area. He said an opportunity may have been gained in that Pakistan was now led by democratic leadership, adding that "Mrs. Bhutto after all was murdered by this oppressor." Seeking to deflate the charge that the mini-jirga had been held hostage to the fluctuation in relations between the two governments, Governor Ghani said, "It came late but it came strong."

15. (U) Abdullah said that one point which was not negotiable was the constitutional supremacy of both nations. He said the door had always been open for those that accepted this but that, after the decisions taken at the mini-jirga, "now the door was open wide."

Taliban made "More Rigid"

16. (C) During a meeting October 29, Awami National Party (ANP) jirga delegate Afrasiab Khattak told Polcouns that both sides are now charged with forming committees to engage in the "dialogue with the opposition." Polcouns asked under what terms that dialogue would take place. Khattak said that would be decided by the committees which would establish their own rules. He suggested that little activity would take place beyond the creation of committees prior to the next jirga, meant to be held in Kabul, perhaps in December. Khattak was critical of Governor Ghani, who the ANP wants replaced with an ANP candidate. Khattak claimed that Ghani was representing the interests of ISI and the military, which allegedly wanted to retain their ties to the Taliban and thus were supporting negotiations. He said his own position was that, while it may be necessary to talk to the Taliban, he could not support negotiations until they renounced violence and terrorism; they had done neither. Khattak added that the "talk of talks" with the Taliban "will only make them more rigid." He said he had heard from several sources, including one in the Gulf, that al Qaida leaders said there would be no talks with Afghanistan leaders but only with NATO forces and the USG. Khattak said, in his view, the "talk of talks" was emboldening Taliban leaders who felt they could brush past interlocutors. He felt that momentum for the negotiations was built on Afghanistan President Karzai's quest for reelection.

Qureshi on Terrorism

17. (U) FM Qureshi's public statements at the top of the meeting October 27 were mostly a rehashing and endorsement of the Pakistani parliament's joint resolution on security. Qureshi said, "Afghanistan and Pakistan have both suffered immensely and continue to suffer at the hands of extremism, militancy and terrorism. This is the gravest threat to both countries. Pakistan and Afghanistan, therefore, need to cooperate closely to effectively counter and completely eliminate this curse. Representatives of the people of Pakistan unanimously declared the nations' firm resolve to stand united against this growing menace, and to address its root causes. Pakistan's territory shall not be used for any kind of attacks on other countries, and foreign fighters, if found, will be expelled from our soil. At the same time, Pakistan's' sovereignty and territorial integrity shall be safeguarded at all costs."

...And Reconciliation

18. (U) On reconciliation, Qureshi said: "Dialogue will be given high priority with all those willing to abide by the Constitution of Pakistan and rule of law and development of the arrested areas will be expedited. For lasting success, negotiations and reconciliation must be as essential part of the process. The wrongs and neglect of the past must be corrected. Political, economic, and social reforms must proceed hand in hand. We must not shut doors of negotiations to those sons of the soil. The distinguished jirga members imbibe the true spirit of tribal traditions and wisdom in

peacefully resolving complex issues. We have full trust in your collective wisdom and our ability to navigate your way to success."

Abdullah: "terrorism and extremism has ruined Afghanistan"

¶9. (U) Afghanistan FM Abdullah Abdullah's public remarks were a call for joint action. He said, "both countries have abilities to counter terrorism and extremism. Afghanistan is ready to work with Pakistan to face challenges. Terrorism and extremism has ruined Afghanistan. There is (a) dire need to highlight (the) true image of Islam at (the) international level. Afghanistan can enter in dialogue with those who want peace and development in the country."

Zardari on Dialogue

¶10. (C) In a briefing to missions October 30, the German Ambassador told us that the subjects of the mini-jirga and "dialogue" were discussed in the October 28 meeting between German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier and President Asif Zardari. Zardari told Steinmeier he was "deeply skeptical" of the value of dialogue, but said "at the end it will be necessary but only from a position of strength."

¶11. (C) Comment: The jirga's unfortunate focus on negotiations should not come as a surprise. Pakistani elites (including Governor Ghani, some tribal political leaders and the media) have seized upon the coincident release of remarks by the UK Ambassador to Kabul suggesting we cannot win in Afghanistan, statements by several U.S. officials re-iterating our policy of outreach to reconcilables in Afghanistan, and reports of a Saudi-brokered negotiation between Kabul and the Taliban to assume there is a green light for negotiations with militants on both sides of the border. The Pakistani media is misquoting or twisting official U.S. statements to make it appear as if there is a new U.S. policy on this issue. All of this is feeding an audience that, despite the stated resolve of the Pakistani military and government, still wants to believe that the militants can be wished away with only negotiations. The Pakistani parliament's joint resolution against terror was a welcome consensus document, but it, too, focused on the negotiations angle to paper over concern about military action that continues to produce collateral civilian destruction. The GOP has begun a fledgling hearts and minds campaign, but they need to do more.

PATTERSON